

Message Text

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ACTION EUR-12

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 FEA-01 TRSY-02 ERDA-05 AID-05
CEA-01 CIAE-00 COME-00 DODE-00 EB-08 FPC-01 H-01
INR-07 INT-05 L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-05 OMB-01 PM-05
USIA-06 OES-07 SP-02 SS-15 STR-05 ACDA-07 PA-01
PRS-01 /107 W
-----081953 222246Z /20

R 221501Z SEP 77
FM AMEMBASSY ATHENS
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 2585
INFO AMEMBASSY ANKARA
AMEMBASSY BRUSSELS
AMEMBASSY NICOSIA
USMISSION NATO

C O N F I D E N T I A L ATHENS 8741

BRUSSELS FOR USEEC

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: ENRG, GR
SUBJECT: SUSPENSION OF GREEK OIL EXPLORATION IN AEGEAN DENIED

1. A FRONT-PAGE ARTICLE IN THE SEPTEMBER 18 ISSUE OF THE PRO-GOVERNMENT NEWSPAPER "KATHIMERINI" ALLEGED THAT THE GREEK GOVERNMENT HAS DECIDED TO SUSPEND OIL EXPLORATION ACTIVITIES IN THE AEGEAN SEA ON THE INSTRUCTIONS OF PRIME MINISTER CARAMANLIS. PROMPTING THE DECISION, THE ARTICLE CLAIMED, WAS DISAPPOINTMENT OVER THE MEAGER QUANTITY AND POOR QUALITY OF THE OIL THUS FAR DISCOVERED AROUND THE ISLAND OF THASSOS AND THE DESIRE TO AVOID FURTHER AGRAVATING GRECO-TURKISH RELATIONS. THE FOLLOWING ISSUE OF "KATHIMERINI" THEN CARRIED A COLUMN ON THE SUBJECT BY GEORGE DROSSOS, A LEADING POLITICAL COMMENTATOR KNOWN TO BE CLOSE TO THE PRIME MINISTER, WHO LABELED THE MOVE TO SUSPEND OIL EXPLORATION ACTIVITIES IN THE AEGEAN "A GOOD WILL GES-
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TURE" BY THE GREEKS DESIGNED TO AVOID PROVOKING TURKEY. THE SAME NEWSPAPER, HOWEVER, SUBSEQUENTLY PRINTED A FIRM DENIAL OF THE STORY BY THE PUBLIC PETROLEUM CORPORATION (DEP).

2. DURING SEPTEMBER 21 COURTESY CALL BY EMBOFF ON DEP GENERAL MANAGER KYRIAKOS ZAKHOS, THE LATTER CATEGORICALLY

DENIED RECEIVING INSTRUCTIONS FROM CARAMANLIS OR ANYONE ELSE TO SUSPEND OIL EXPLORATION IN THE AEGEAN. ACCORDING TO ZAKHOS, MINISTER OF COORDINATION PAPALIGOURAS HAD BEEN OUTRAGED BY THE PRESS STORY AND HAD INSTRUCTED ZAKHOS TO ISSUE AN IMMEDIATE DENIAL WHICH WAS CARRIED IN THE SEPTEMBER 20 ISSUE OF "KATHIMERINI" AS WELL AS BY OTHER NEWSPAPERS. ZAKHOS EMPHASIZED THAT OIL EXPLORATION ACTIVITIES WERE CONTINUING THROUGHOUT GREECE, INCLUDING THE AEGEAN, IN ACCORDANCE WITH DEP'S LONG-STANDING BASIC PLANS. HE ENVISAGED NO SUBSTANTIAL CHANGES, PARTICULARLY SINCE CONTRACTS AND ARRANGEMENTS WITH FOREIGN OIL DRILLING FIRMS HAD BEEN SIGNED AND WERE IN THE PROCESS OF BEING CARRIED OUT. ZAKHOS NOTED THAT, WHILE GREEK INTEREST WAS CONCENTRATED IN THE NESTOS DELTA AND THE IONIAN SEA AREAS, THE PRESS REPORTS ABOUT A SUSPENSION OF OIL EXPLORATION ACTIVITY IN THE AEGEAN WERE UNFOUNDED.

3. COMMENT: THE GOVERNMENT'S VIGOROUS DENIAL OF THE "KATHIMERINI" STORY REFLECTS THE POLITICAL SENSITIVITY IN GREECE WITH RESPECT TO ANYTHING CONCERNING THE AEGEAN. OUR UNDERSTANDING IS THE DEP'S PLANS IN THE IMMEDIATE MONTHS AHEAD DO NOT CALL FOR MUCH ACTIVITY IN THE AEGEAN AND THE "KATHIMERINE" STORY MAY BE BASED ON A DISTORTED ACCOUNT OF THIS. IN ANY CASE, IT WOULD BECOME EVIDENT VERY QUICKLY IF THE GOG, IN FACT, SUSPENDED ITS EXPLORATION ACTIVITIES IN THE THASSOS ISLAND AREA AND SHIFTED TO THE IONIAN SEA WHERE NO EXTENSIVE EXPLORATION

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ACTIVITIES ARE UNDERWAY AT PRESENT.
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Message Attributes

Automatic Decaptioning: X
Capture Date: 01-Jan-1994 12:00:00 am
Channel Indicators: n/a
Current Classification: UNCLASSIFIED
Concepts: OILS, EXPLORATION, AEGEAN, THE PRESS, ALLEGATIONS
Control Number: n/a
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Decaption Date: 01-Jan-1960 12:00:00 am
Decaption Note:
Disposition Action: RELEASED
Disposition Approved on Date:
Disposition Case Number: n/a
Disposition Comment: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Date: 22 May 2009
Disposition Event:
Disposition History: n/a
Disposition Reason:
Disposition Remarks:
Document Number: 1977ATHENS08741
Document Source: CORE
Document Unique ID: 00
Drafter: n/a
Enclosure: n/a
Executive Order: GS
Errors: N/A
Expiration:
Film Number: D770345-0892
Format: TEL
From: ATHENS
Handling Restrictions: n/a
Image Path:
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Legacy Key: link1977/newtext/t19770936/aaaabdqc.tel
Line Count: 96
Litigation Code IDs:
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Litigation History:
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Office: ACTION EUR
Original Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Original Handling Restrictions: n/a
Original Previous Classification: n/a
Original Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Page Count: 2
Previous Channel Indicators: n/a
Previous Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Reference: n/a
Retention: 0
Review Action: RELEASED, APPROVED
Review Content Flags:
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Review Event:
Review Exemptions: n/a
Review Media Identifier:
Review Release Date: n/a
Review Release Event: n/a
Review Transfer Date:
Review Withdrawn Fields: n/a
SAS ID: 1179617
Secure: OPEN
Status: NATIVE
Subject: SUSPENSION OF GREEK OIL EXPLORATION IN AEGEAN DENIED
TAGS: ENRG, GR
To: STATE
Type: TE
vdkgvwkey: odbc://SAS/SAS.dbo.SAS_Docs/45e77240-c288-dd11-92da-001cc4696bcc
Review Markings:
Margaret P. Grafeld
Declassified/Released
US Department of State
EO Systematic Review
22 May 2009
Markings: Margaret P. Grafeld Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 22 May 2009